

Tom Dula

Grade Level: 6,7,8

Subject Area: Social Studies, Language Arts, Theater Arts

General Overview

On May 1, 1868 Tom Dula (pronounced Dooley) was hanged for the murder of Laura Foster. The hanging followed several sensational trials, including two in the North Carolina Supreme Court. Prior to the hanging Tom Dula gave one of his attorneys a note in which he said that he was the only one who “had any hand in the murder of Laura Foster.” In the 1950s a ballad, entitled “Hang Down Your Head, Tom Dooley,” was recorded about the events and reached #1 on the Billboard chart for 1958.

NOTE: This trial includes frank discussion of sexuality and sexually-transmitted disease that has not been included in the lesson plan material. If the teacher uses actual trial materials and publicity, such will be mentioned.

Activity 1

Time Required: 1-2 class periods (*teacher's discretion*)

Materials: **Tom Dula Worksheet (pdf)**
Supplementary images (online)
Students' materials of choice (for constructing the newspaper)
Internet access (optional)

State Standards:

Grade 6	Language Arts	<i>Goals 1,2,3,4</i>
Grade 7	Language Arts	<i>Goals 1,2,3,4</i>
Grade 8	Language Arts	<i>Goals 1,2,3,4</i>

Preparation

Students should read the materials provided, including the short overview of Dula's story, description of others involved in the story, and abbreviated events of the trial. Encourage students to visit the interactive map and look through original documents online.

Instructions

As a class, create a newspaper complete with masthead and articles in which the murder of Laura Foster, the trials, and subsequent hanging of Tom Dula are the focus.

DOB:1844 DOD: May 1, 1868

The story of Tom Dula (pronounced Dooley) is a complicated web of characters and their actions that lead to the murder of Laura Foster in Iredell County, North Carolina. It's a story made infamous not only by sensational court trials but also by several versions of a folk song written about the Tom Dula case.

Activity 2

Time Required: 45 minutes (*teacher's discretion*)

Materials: Pencil and Paper
Audio clip of “Hang Down Your Head Tom Dooley (online)”
Lyrics to “Hang Down Your Head Tom Dooley” (pdf)
Internet access (optional)

State Standards:

Grade 6	Language Arts	<i>Goals 2, 4, 5.01</i>
Grade 7	Language Arts	<i>Goals 2, 4, 5.01</i>
Grade 8	Language Arts	<i>Goals 2, 4, 5.01</i>

Preparation

Students should listen to The Kingston Trio's version of “Hang Down Your Head, Tom Dooley”, and/or refer to the printout of lyrics to the song.

Instructions

Discuss the song and its characterization of Tom Dooley as opposed to the character of Tom Dula that is given in the court testimony. Have students make a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting Tom's two

characterizations. Then discuss other fictional/non-fictional stories in which the “bad guy” has also been portrayed as a hero, possibly a character from a recent reading. Examples are Robin Hood, Rhett Butler in *Gone With the Wind*, and Captain Jack Sparrow in “Pirates of the Caribbean.”

The following questions should provoke discussion.

1. Does the song disregard the facts of the case?
2. When you hear the song how does it make you feel about Tom Dooley?

Activity 3

Time Required: 1-2 class periods (*teacher's discretion*)
Materials: Supplementary images and interactive map (online)
[Tom Dula Worksheet \(pdf\)](#)
[“Exhibit A” Map worksheet \(pdf\)](#)
Internet access (optional)

State Standards:	Grade 6	Language Arts	Goals 1, 2, 5
		Theater Arts	Goals 1.02, 2.02, 2.03, 4.03, 4.05, 5.01
	Grade 7	Language Arts	Goals 1, 2, 5
		Theater Arts	Goals 1.02, 1.05, 2.04, 4.03, 4.04, 5.01
	Grade 8	Language Arts	Goals 1, 2, 5
		Theater Arts	Goals 1.02, 2.04, 4.03, 4.04, 5.01
		Social Studies	Goals 4.04

Preparation

Students should read the materials provided, including the short overview of Dula’s story, description of others involved in the story, and abbreviated events of the trial. They should also examine the interactive map (used as “Exhibit A” in the actual trial) online.

Instructions

Dramatize the trial scene. (Reader’s theater style or actual dramatization) This could take place as an in-class assignment or as a group project outside the classroom. Then complete the optional worksheet pertaining to the map used in the trial.

Activity 4

Time Required: 45 minutes (*teacher's discretion*)
Materials: Supplementary images and interactive map (online) optional
[Tom Dula Worksheet \(pdf\)](#)
[Direct vs. Circumstantial Evidence worksheet \(pdf\)](#)
Internet access (optional)

State Standards:	Grade 6	Language Arts	Goals 2, 4.02
	Grade 7	Language Arts	Goals 2, 4.02
	Grade 8	Language Arts	Goals 2, 4.02

Preparation

Students should read the materials provided, including the short overview of Dula’s story, description of others involved in the story, and abbreviated events of the trial. *Optional: They may also examine the interactive map used as “Exhibit A” in the actual trial.*

Instructions

Complete the Direct vs. Circumstantial evidence worksheet based on instances from the Tom Dula trial.

Sources

State v. Thomas Dula, Case 8122, Supreme Court Original Cases, 1800-1909, State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

State v. Thomas Dula, Case 8123, Supreme Court Original Cases, 1800-1909, State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

West, John F. The Ballad of Tom Dula: The Documented Story Behind the Murder of Laura Foster and the Trials and Execution of Tom Dula. Durham, NC: Moore Publishing Company